

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 24, 2003

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2003–04 REGULAR SESSION

**ASSEMBLY BILL**

**No. 1591**

**Introduced by Committee on Veterans Affairs (Parra (Chair),  
Cohn, Kehoe, Matthews, Mullin, Nakano, Salinas, and Wiggins)**

February 21, 2003

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An act to ~~amend Section 80 of~~ *add Section 971.5 to the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.*

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1591, as amended, Committee on Veterans Affairs. ~~Department of Veterans Affairs—County veteran service officers: disbursements to counties.~~

~~Existing law establishes in state government the Department of Veterans Affairs and authorizes the director of the department to employ all employees necessary to carry out his or her powers and duties, as provided.~~

~~This bill would make technical, nonsubstantive changes to these provisions.~~

*Existing law authorizes each county board of supervisors to appoint a county veteran service officer, and permits the county to provide the officer with any assistance and facilities that it determines to be necessary. Existing law requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to disburse funds, appropriated to the department for the purpose of supporting county veteran service officers pursuant to the annual Budget Act, on a pro rata basis to counties that comply with certain conditions.*

*This bill would appropriate \$3,250,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs for disbursement to the counties for purposes of supporting county veteran service officers, and would make legislative findings and declarations in that regard.*

Vote: ~~majority~~ <sup>2/3</sup>. Appropriation: ~~no~~ yes. Fiscal committee: ~~no~~ yes. State-mandated local program: no.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

1     ~~SECTION 1. Section 80 of the Military and Veterans Code is~~  
2     ~~amended to read:~~

3     ~~80. The director may employ subject to law such any expert,~~  
4     ~~technical, legal, clerical, and other employees as may be necessary~~  
5     ~~to carry out his or her powers and duties. Except as expressly~~  
6     ~~otherwise provided in Section 71, the director shall be the sole~~  
7     ~~appointing authority for the department for all positions.~~  
8     ~~Whenever possible preference shall be given to veterans for~~  
9     ~~employment in the department.~~

10    ~~SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the~~  
11    ~~following:~~

12    ~~(a) In 1997, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed~~  
13    ~~Senate Bill 608 (hereafter SB 608), enacted as Chapter 318 of the~~  
14    ~~Statutes of 1997, that amended Section 972.1 of the Military and~~  
15    ~~Veterans Code.~~

16    ~~(b) SB 608 required the Department of Veterans Affairs to~~  
17    ~~annually determine the amount of new or increased monetary~~  
18    ~~benefits paid to eligible veterans by the federal government that~~  
19    ~~were attributable to the assistance of county veteran service~~  
20    ~~officers, and also required the Department of Finance to review the~~  
21    ~~Department of Veterans Affairs' determination in time to use the~~  
22    ~~information for purposes of the annual Budget Act. SB 608 stated~~  
23    ~~legislative findings and declarations and encouraged the~~  
24    ~~Department of Finance, after reviewing the Department of~~  
25    ~~Veterans Affairs' determination, to consider an increase in the~~  
26    ~~annual budget for county veteran service officers, in an amount not~~  
27    ~~to exceed \$5,000,000, if justified.~~

28    ~~(c) SB 608 stated as follows: Section 1. The Legislature finds~~  
29    ~~and declares that through the efforts of the county veterans service~~  
30    ~~officers, benefits to the veterans in this state approximate an~~  
31    ~~average of \$88,000,000 per year from the federal government~~

1 *either through the United States Department of Veteran Affairs or*  
2 *other federal agencies. It has been determined by the California*  
3 *Department of Finance that 33 percent of these funds become part*  
4 *of the State General Fund. The state however provides only 16*  
5 *percent of the subvention for the county veterans service officers'*  
6 *functions with the counties providing the rest. It is, therefore, the*  
7 *intent of the Legislature in enacting this act that, in keeping with*  
8 *the philosophy that whose efforts result in efficiency should benefit*  
9 *thereby, a portion of the funds attributable to the performance of*  
10 *county veterans service officers be utilized in funding their*  
11 *operations.*

12 *(d) In 1997, through the efforts of county veterans service*  
13 *officers, annual new or increased federal veterans benefits had*  
14 *risen to \$88,000,000, the State of California began providing*  
15 *funding to county veterans service officers on an annual basis. The*  
16 *amount of new or increased benefits has risen to \$206,900,000 in*  
17 *the 2001–02 fiscal year, an increase of over 100 percent since the*  
18 *state began providing General Fund funding for the county*  
19 *veterans service officers.*

20 *(e) The county veterans service officers participation in the*  
21 *state Welfare Referral Program annually saves state and federal*  
22 *government \$50,000,000 in welfare cost avoidance.*

23 *(f) The Legislative Analyst recently found that the state could*  
24 *be saving up to \$250,000,000 by transferring veterans from the*  
25 *Medi-Cal program to the Veterans Administration (VA) health*  
26 *care system.*

27 *(g) The county veterans service officers who are county*  
28 *employees are facing reductions in staff as a result of decreases in*  
29 *county budgets.*

30 *(h) The need for more services for veterans is increasing due to*  
31 *the advancing age of our World War II and Korean War veterans.*

32 *SEC. 2. Section 971.5 is added to the Military and Veterans*  
33 *Code, to read:*

34 *971.5. (a) The Legislature finds and declares the county*  
35 *veterans service officers provide valuable services to California's*  
36 *veterans and to the state and its counties by assisting veterans in*  
37 *obtaining federal benefits for which the veterans are entitled. The*  
38 *Legislature further finds and declares that the county veterans*  
39 *service officers contribute to increased revenues and significant*

1 *cost avoidance for the state and its counties far in excess of the*  
2 *amount of state general funding provided to them.*  
3 *(b) There is hereby appropriated from the General Fund the*  
4 *sum of \$3,250,000 to the Department of Veterans Affairs for*  
5 *disbursement to the counties in accordance with the existing*  
6 *procedures established under Section 972.1.*

